Orestes

(d. 28 August 476)

BRIEFING

Orestes (died 28 August 476) was a Roman general and politician of Pannonian ancestry. He joined the court of Attila the Hun in his native Pannonia, in which he reached a high position, becoming one of Attila's most trusted men. Orestes also held considerable influence in the late Western Roman Empire. His son Romulus Augustulus became Roman Emperor of the West.

BIOGRAPHY

Born to a Roman aristocratic family from Pannonia Savia, Orestes was son of Tatulus, a pagan, and son-in-law to Romulus, who served as *comes* in the Western Roman Empire. After Pannonia was ceded to Attila the Hun, Orestes joined Attila's court, becoming one of Attila's intimate advisors and most trusted lieutenants, and reaching high position as a secretary (*notarius*) in 449 and 452. In 449 Attila sent him twice to Constantinople with ambassador Eslas.

In 475, Orestes was appointed *magister militum* and *patricius* by Western Roman Emperor Julius Nepos. This proved to be a mistake on the part of Nepos. By 28 August 475, Orestes, at the head of the *foederati* levies, managed to take control of the government in Ravenna, which had been the de facto capital of the Western Roman Empire since 402. Julius Nepos fled without a fight to Dalmatia, where he would continue to reign until his assassination in 480. With the emperor far away, Orestes elevated his son Romulus as *augustus*, recognized by most historians as the last Western Roman emperor. He was nicknamed Augustulus, meaning "little Augustus", as the emperor was only a child at the time he became emperor in 475.

IN POPULAR CULTURE

- *Orestes* was played by Andrew Pleavin in the 2001 miniseries *Attila*, which depicts his time in service of the Hunnic king.

- The character of *Orestes* was played by Iain Glen in the 2007 historical-fiction film *The Last Legion*, which shows the character during his period of rule in Rome, although the film deviates significantly from the historical record of these events.

- *Orestes* is portrayed as the primary villain in Michael Curtis Ford's novel *The Fall of Rome*.